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IS OUR EDUCATIONAL SYSTEM TOP-HEAVY?

BY ELLIOTT FLOWER.

Is the educational system of the United States top-heavy? Are we putting time, labor, and money on the superstructure at the expense of the foundations?

Statistics give an affirmative answer to these questions, but the reader cannot realize how emphatic that answer is until he has studied them. He knows that we have trouble in finding enough primary and grammar schools to go round, but he does not fully comprehend the extent of that trouble, and he does not know how much money is expended on higher education that could be used to ten times more advantage near the bottom. He knows that we have to be taxed for the support of the lower grade institutions, while we put our hands in our pockets and give freely to those that rank as colleges and universities; but he does not know that the latter are so numerous that there are thirty-eight of them in this country that have not exceeding 100 students each, and that the former are so few that it is doubtful if there is a single large city in which duplicate sessions, rented buildings, and temporary structures are not necessary to even a pretense of providing for all children of school age.

It is not the purpose of the writer to criticise the higher educational institutions or their founders and supporters, except so far as may be necessary to point out how better results might be achieved with the money now annually expended upon and by them. They are unquestionably doing meritorious work, but it is also unquestionably true that the work would be of more real value if part of it were conducted along other lines. The nation that gives a fair education to all its people must have a greater future before it than the one that gives a particularly good education to only a proportion of them, no matter how great that

proportion may be ; and, consequently, the aim of a country should be to educate all. Of course, there are bound to be inequalities in education, as there are inequalities in the mental capacities of students, but there should be no lack of room in the basement of our national educational structure. We are told that there is always room at the top ; we should see to it that there is also room at the bottom.

It is hardly necessary to discuss the need of ample primary and grammar school accommodations. No one will deny that there should be room for every child of school age, and no one will deny that the opening of every school year shows the lack of it. The extent of the shortcomings in this line, however, is another matter. Very few people realize the shifts to which school superintendents all over the country are put to avoid turning away children who apply for admission ; and as this argument must hang largely upon their troubles and experiences it is, perhaps, just as well to bring these facts home to the reader first. For this purpose the conditions that exist in five cities that pretty well cover the country, and are at least sufficient to give a good general idea of the situation, may be cited.

In New York, at the beginning of the present school year, according to John Jasper, City Superintendent of Schools, " the total number of refused admissions on September 13th and 14th (the opening days) was 6,913." Continuing, Mr. Jasper writes :

" It has been found necessary, in order to accommodate these children, to arrange for half day sessions in the more crowded districts. Temporary quarters have been engaged, and more would be if the law of the State permitted this board to engage any building that it thought suitable. The State law reads that in all large cities no building shall be used for a large assembly that is over thirty-five feet high and not equipped with fire escapes."

Even after these arrangements had been made there was difficulty in providing for all the children, and a month after school had opened the New York *Herald* stated that in the Seventh, Tenth, Thirteenth, and Seventeenth Wards there were 2,782 children on the waiting list. The police department was then called upon to help solve the problem and policemen were assigned to the duty of conducting children from the crowded districts to those where there was more room.

The conditions in Brooklyn are much the same as in New York, as the following statement from William H. Maxwell, Superintendent of Public Instruction, proves :

"I regret to say that Brooklyn has not school accommodations sufficient for all children of school age. Even with duplicate sessions in most of our schools, many children are refused admission every year."

In Chicago even more difficulty is experienced in providing for all the children, as would naturally be expected, owing to the rapid increase in population. At the beginning of the school year, Albert G. Lane, Superintendent of Education, reported that there were 10,669 pupils in rented rooms and 11,746 that had to be cared for by establishing duplicate half-day sessions in a large number of the school buildings. For the purpose of illustrating what these figures really mean to many of the children who are seeking an education in the city by the lake, the following from a recent issue of the *Chicago Times Herald* may be quoted :

"In Blue Island avenue, between Sixteenth and Eighteenth streets, there are five divisions of the Blue Island branch school, all located in cramped, low-ceilinged, frame store-rooms. There are no means of ventilating any of them, and in some the toilet rooms are located on the same floor with the recitation rooms, the fetid atmosphere being almost nauseating to one passing from the comparatively fresh air of the street. All of the buildings in which the divisions are located are old and small. They have been used for saloons, grocery stores and the like for a score of years, until rented by the school board."

From St. Louis, Superintendent F. Louis Soldan sent the following reply to an inquiry as to the accommodations :

"In order to accommodate all the children that apply for admission we have duplicate sessions in about twenty buildings, and also have a very few rented rooms for that purpose. It is the policy of the board to replace rented buildings and duplicate sessions by new buildings in the ensuing year."

To the credit of St. Louis be it said that the outlook there is more encouraging than in any of the other cities that have been heard from. Even Denver has to hold more duplicate sessions than the Missouri city, as the following from Superintendent Grace Espy Patton demonstrates :

"Denver has not school accommodations for all children of school age, but makes provision for all who apply for entrance. The number of rented buildings is seventeen, and they furnish accommodations for about 1,200 children. Duplicate half-day sessions are held in thirty-one school rooms."

Other illustrations could be given, but these are certainly sufficient to prove the condition of affairs and to show that it is not confined to any particular part of the country. One general statement that "more room and better facilities are needed" would cover the case of every large city in the country.

Now, turn to the higher educational institutions and note the difference. While the city schools are unable to accommodate all the children who apply, or at least do it only with great difficulty, many of the universities and colleges are hardly able to secure enough students to make it worth while to remain open. Here is a list by States, as complete as it is possible to make it, of the number of institutions conferring the degree of B. A. and having not to exceed two hundred students each :

Alabama.....	3	Massachusetts.....	2	Oklahoma	1
Arkansas	2	Maryland	3	Pennsylvania	10
Arizona.....	1	Michigan.....	1	South Carolina.....	6
California.....	4	Mississippi.....	2	South Dakota.....	2
Colorado.....	1	Minnesota.....	5	Tennessee	8
Delaware.....	1	Missouri.....	10	Vermont.....	1
District of Columbia.	2	Montana.....	1	Virginia.....	2
Florida.....	2	New York.....	10	Washington	1
Georgia.....	2	New Jersey.....	3	West Virginia.....	2
Illinois.....	10	North Carolina.....	6	Wisconsin.....	3
Indiana.....	5	North Dakota.....	2	Wyoming	1
Iowa.....	7	Nebraska.....	1	—	—
Kansas.....	5	New Mexico.....	1	Total.....	149
Kentucky.....	4	Ohio.....	9		
Louisiana.....	2	Oregon.....	5		

One hundred and forty-nine institutions, a few supported by State appropriations, but most of them deriving their income from endowment funds or private subscriptions, and not one of them has over two hundred students ! Could not some of that money be used to better advantage in providing facilities for educating those who are practically crowded out of the common schools now ? Would it not do more good if it were devoted to the establishment and support of trade schools—schools that would get nearer to many of the poor and the lower classes and give them just the amount of education that they need and want ? Does not the expenditure of so much money for the higher education of a comparatively few people, when there are so many who stand in need of just the little education that may make them self-supporting, seem almost like wanton waste ?

Really, it seems as if there could be but one answer to these questions.

Unfortunately, it is impossible to get at the exact amount of money expended on these one hundred and forty-nine institutions annually, as many of them decline to give any information as to income or endowments. Most of them unquestionably have little ; but, even so, the aggregate annual expenditures must amount to more than half a million dollars, and very likely is

nearer a million. A great deal of good could be done with that amount of money. Doubtless a great deal of good is being done with it; but is it being expended so as to bring the very best educational results to this country? Again, it seems to the writer as if there could be but one answer to the question.

Of course it may be urged that many of these minor colleges are denominational, and that religion—or rather sectarianism—gives them a valid excuse for existence. This may be conceded in a measure, but could not one-third of them do all the work and do it better and more cheaply? If a boy wants a college education it is not necessary to immediately locate a university in the next block to him; but if you want to educate the children of the slums you must locate your school where they live. Therein lies the difference. And in spite of the fact that it is of much more importance that the child should have a rudimentary education than it is that the youth should go to college, we exert ourselves much more for the latter than for the former. We trouble ourselves more about his opportunities, we boast more of the chances that lie open to him, and if we have any money to give away we spend it for his benefit. Why doesn't some educational philanthropist endow schools that are needed for the masses? What is the use of piling on higher education without giving many the opportunity to get to it? It is true that some trade schools have been founded, but they are comparatively few. Everyone wants to work at the top.

Look at it from another point of view, and the absurdity of doing so much in the tower when there is so much that is left undone in the basement becomes even more apparent. According to the *College Year Book*, to which publication I am indebted for a great deal of valuable information, there is one instructor for every thirteen and one-sixth students in the higher educational institutions of the country, and this in spite of the fact that in some of the larger institutions the classes are extraordinarily large. It seems as if there must be a waste of talent there somewhere. Again, if we take out the thirty institutions that have the largest attendance, there is only an average of one hundred and ninety-nine students to each of the four hundred and forty-six institutions left. The thirty institutions referred to had a total attendance last year of 55,021, while the other four hundred and forty-six had a total of 88,611.

This means that a little less than one-fifteenth of the colleges and universities of this country care for a little more than one-third of all the students. Could anything better illustrate the point I have endeavored to make?

Let me put it in another way. Could not the money used for the endowment of the University of Chicago have been used to far better advantage educationally if it had gone into some other channel? Would it not be doing more good now if it were being utilized to advance some meritorious plan a little lower in the educational scale? Was there any real necessity for the University of Chicago? This is not to be taken as a criticism of the University, which is unquestionably an excellent one. It is merely selected as an illustration, because of its magnificent endowment and comparatively recent organization. At the time it was planned there were two good universities in the suburbs of Chicago—Northwestern University at Evanston and the Lake Forest University—and half a dozen more within half a day's ride of that city. The University of Illinois at Champaign, the University of Wisconsin at Madison, and the University of Michigan at Ann Arbor are large, excellent, and prosperous universities; and in addition to these there are sixty-two other recognized institutions that confer the degree of B. A. in the States of Illinois, Wisconsin, Indiana, and Michigan, all of which did, and still do, draw students from Chicago. In view of these facts, although without any desire to criticise Mr. Rockefeller or detract from the value and credit of the institution he founded, it may be contended with some show of justice that the income of nearly two million dollars which the University of Chicago enjoys would be doing more good to-day if it were being expended in the furtherance of some plan to better educate the masses, either by improved primary and grammar school facilities or the establishment of trade schools that will teach something of practical value to the boy who doesn't want to enter a profession and isn't mentally fitted to take advantage of the opportunities for a collegiate education, even if he had the time and money.

Chicago is not selected to illustrate this point because she is exceptionally well located from an educational point of view, for she is not. New York would answer quite as well. Without going so far as Boston to the northeast, Syracuse to the northwest, and Baltimore to the southwest, one can find fifty univer-

sities and colleges of one kind or another ; and if all of New York, Massachusetts, Pennsylvania, and Maryland be included the number becomes eighty-one.

From still another point of view it may be urged that it is wrong to attempt to run educational institutions on such small capital as is available to many of them. Conceding that Mr. Rockefeller could not have made a better use of his money than he did in founding the University of Chicago, what excuse is there for the existence of many of the little colleges that are endeavoring to struggle along on incomes that would hardly be sufficient for the support of a good-sized family? One college at Trenton, Mo., has 169 students and an income of \$2,000 ; another at McKenzie, Tenn., 200 students and \$1,500 ; another at Bowdon, Ga., 143 students and \$1,500 ; another at New Berlin, Pa., 79 students and \$3,000 ; a university at Canton, Mo., 71 students and \$1,500, and a college at St. Joseph, Mo., 85 students and \$5,040. These have been taken at random from the College Year Book, and are given merely as examples of a large number of like institutions. The writer does not wish to be understood as making an attack upon them or upon any other particular college ; but, taking these little institutions as a class, he does believe and assert that no college can be properly run on a miniature income, and that the money so expended is needed elsewhere. Yet, aside from those institutions that decline to make any statement as to their incomes, there are eighty-seven colleges in the United States that have not to exceed \$10,000 per annum each, and it is probable that at least twenty of that number have only \$5,000 or less.

The eighty-seven to which I have referred are located as follows :

Alabama.....	1	Kentucky.....	2	Pennsylvania.....	1
Arkansas.....	3	Louisiana.....	2	South Carolina.....	3
Arizona.....	1	Maryland.....	2	South Dakota.....	1
California.....	1	Mississippi.....	1	Tennessee.....	10
Colorado.....	1	Minnesota.....	3	Texas.....	1
Florida.....	1	Missouri.....	6	Washington.....	2
Georgia.....	3	New York.....	1	Wisconsin.....	3
Illinois.....	5	North Carolina.....	4		—
Indiana.....	4	Nebraska.....	2	Total.....	87
Iowa.....	7	Ohio.....			
Kansas.....	6	Oregon.....	3		

If the figures for all the colleges were available it is probable that this total would be over a hundred, and very likely nearer one hundred and twenty-five.

What an absurdity it is to try to run colleges on so little

money! How much better it would be if some of these funds could be combined and more students cared for at less expense per capita! To my mind much more could be accomplished if we could blot out half of these institutions, combine the other half into a smaller number of larger and better equipped universities and colleges and devote the money thus saved to the kind of education most needed. Of course, this is impracticable, but at least philanthropists who are looking about for ways to spend money to the best educational advantage can refrain from establishing universities, colleges, and scholarships until those who have to fight for even the lowest common school education have been cared for. According to the best figures at hand, we are spending \$8 a year to a student in the grammar schools and \$109 a year to a student in the higher educational institutions, and it is all out of proportion. If it were possible to get all the figures the difference unquestionably would be much greater. In fact, the money expended in giving opportunities for higher education probably would exceed \$125 a student; and this does not include the money that the students themselves pay into the institutions.

In any event, it is evident that the child has difficulty in getting its eight dollars' worth of education, while the older student is principally troubled by the fact that he has so great a selection that he is bewildered; and in view of this fact it may not be out of place to suggest to educators and philanthropists that they keep their eyes on the ground for a while. They have been watching the heavens too long.

ELLIOTT FLOWER.